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Jo Anne Barnhart
Commissioner, Social Security Administration
P.O. Box 17703
Baltimore, MD 21235-7703

Oct. 1, 2003

Dear Commissioner Barnhart:

I am writing to support the proposed regulations for continuation of benefits for people who are participating in a program of vocational rehabilitation services, employment services, or other support services (published for public comment on August 1, 2003). The proposed regulations would change the rules which guide how SSA decides to allow continuation of cash benefits for people in vocational or other support training who no longer meet the definition of eligibility for SSI benefits.

I believe that this is a very important proposal and I urge you to publish it as a final rule as soon as possible. Young people with disabilities should remain in school or in vocational training as long as possible to acquire the skills to become as independent as possible. This proposed regulation will make it possible for more young people to finish their educational, vocational, or other support training.

The following are suggestions for strengthening this regulation to ensure better future results for young people needing this service: (1) SSA should apply the new rule retroactively to young adults who already have lost their SSI (and Medicaid), have an IEP, and are not yet 22 years old. (2) In some cases, this protection should continue if the person moves from an educational setting directly into a vocational rehabilitation program, and SSA's regulation should allow for this possibility. (3) The new regulation should not be limited to students with disabilities who are enrolled in special education classes; it should protect any young person who is losing his or her SSI disability benefit at age 18 and is enrolled in school or an appropriate employment or vocational program. (4) The language of the regulation should be broad enough to benefit students with disabilities who are enrolled in a private or parochial school and may not have an IEP.

Sincerely,



Shirley Evans